



Signs As a Marketing Tool

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Have you considered the impact that your sign has on your business?

This Guide discusses signs, what they can do for your business, and how they can be used to your advantage. A checklist for ordering a business sign is also provided.

Introduction

Signs are one of the most efficient and effective means of communication. Signs help people find you; they reach people who are passing by your establishment; they present an image of your business. In short, signs, tell people who you are and what you are selling.

Signs are such a powerful communication medium that it is difficult to estimate the extent of their influence. Other media require the directed attention of the person receiving the message. Signs, however, can convey a message while creating a mood or feeling of atmosphere. It is not necessary for people to give full attention to your sign in order to derive meaning from its presence.

What Is a Sign?

A sign is the most direct form of visual communication available. In fact, so many people use signs without a second thought that it is easy to overlook their importance. When we cannot talk to other people directly in a given location, we tack up signs: wet paint, beware of dog, enter here, garage sales, etc. signs are the only form of mass communication directly available to everyone - they are the people's street communication system.

What Signs Can Do for Your Business

Signs perform three major communications functions for your business; they give information and direction, provide a format for street advertising, and build your image.

Signs Give Information About Your Business and Direct People to Your Business Location.

Signs index the environment so people can find you. This is especially true for travelers, new members of your community, and impulse shoppers who may be on a journey to purchase a particular good or service which you sell. Americans are mobile. Each year 40 million of us travel over 1.7 trillion miles by automobile and approximately 19 per cent of us change our place of residence. A primary source of customers for your business is the large number of people

who are new to your community or who may be just passing through. Your sign is the most effective way of reaching this mobile or transient group of potential customer.

Signs can correct a poor location by substituting effective communication for poor site characteristics. If your business is located on a site which is not visible or in a building which does not correspond with the goods or services offered, your sign can overcome this disability. For example, most buildings are not built to conform to the design needs of any particular type of tenant. Without an effective sign it is often impossible to determine what type of business is being conducted in a given building. In addition, when your site is located off a busy traffic artery or in an area which is not easily accessible your sign can communicate to people who are passing on a busy street several blocks away. If you are located off a busy freeway but far from an exit, your sign becomes your main device for directing people to your business. High-rise signs are used when a business is located away from potential customers' normal pathways of travel.

Signs Are Street Advertising

Your sign provides an easily recognizable display format for the goods or services you are selling. For most businesses the street is where potential customers are. The message conveyed on the street reaches people who are close enough to make a purchase.

Street advertising also helps people develop a memory of your business name and the products and services you sell. People tend to buy from businesses they know.

Signs can build an image for your business and help you identify with the market segment you are trying to reach.

Through materials and design, a sign can appeal to a given group of potential customers. For example, some firms attempt to capture the youth market, others senior citizens, others unmarried single people and so forth. If you have a particular market segment that you wish to attract to your business, your sign can be an important means of bringing these people in.

The Advantages of Signs

On-premise signs are your most effective and efficient means of commercial communication because they are inexpensive, available, practical, easy to use, always on the job, and directly oriented to the trade area of your business.

Signs Are Effective

Your sign is an integral part of your advertising program along with the other forms of commercial communication such as television, radio, newspapers, magazines, and billboards. There are four basic criteria used to judge the effectiveness of these advertising media: (1) coverage of the trade area, (2) repetition of a message, (3) readership of a message, and (4) cost per thousand exposures of a message. Two other criteria important for the small business owner are (5) availability and (6) ease of use. Let's see how signs measure to the above criteria.

1) Signs are oriented to your trade area. Signs do not waste your resources by requiring you to pay for wasted advertising coverage. The people who see your sign are the people who live in your trade area.

2) Signs are always on the job repeating your message to potential customers. Your on-premise sign communicates to potential customers twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, week after week, month after month, year after year. Every time people pass your business

establishment they see your sign. The mere repetition of the message will help them remember your business.

3) Nearly everyone reads signs. Signs are practical to use for nearly everyone is used to looking at signs and using signs, even small children. Studies have shown that people do read and remember what is on signs. When special items are displayed, sales increase for these particular items within the store.

4) Signs are inexpensive. When compared to the cost of advertising in some other media, the on-premise sign is very inexpensive. Table 1 indicates the cost-per-thousand-exposures for various media in a given type of community. Unless your trade area encompasses an entire city or region, where you must rely upon broad based media coverage, there is no better advertising dollar value than your on-premise sign.

5) Signs are available to each and every shop owner. There is no need to schedule the use of your sign. Your sign is available to you whenever you need it and to be used however you please.

6) Signs are easy to use. No special skills or resources are needed to operate a sign once it has been installed. If it is an illuminated sign, all you need to do is flip the switches and that may not be necessary with timing equipment. Once the initial expenditures are made no special resources or professional services are needed. You need only operate and maintain your sign.